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Examining the
Prevalence of Loneliness
and Social Support of
Undergraduates in
Western Michigan
University's Sociology
Department

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Western Michigan University Lee Honors
College Thesis – 05/20/2020

Examining the Prevalence of Loneliness and Social Support of Undergraduates in Western Michigan University's Sociology

Department

Introduction

Humans, by nature, are social beings. This is evident by any number of examples, ranging from the psychological effects of solitary confinement in prisons, to the plethora of social media platforms available today. Humans, clearly, have a desire, if not a need, to be surrounded by and interact with others. Because of this, loneliness, especially its relationship to social support, has been a strong topic of research in academia.

This present study sought to complete a descriptive, cross-sectional analysis that addressed five demographic characteristics (gender, race, relationship status, RSO [Registered Student Organization] or Fraternity/Sorority Membership, and on-campus v/s off-campus living arrangements) and compare those demographics to the perceived loneliness and social support of undergraduate students in 2000-level classes in the Sociology Department of Western Michigan University. Due to this narrow and specific population, it should be made clear that the results of this study are not generalizable to the entire student body of undergrads at Western and this study is not attempting to do so. The undergrads in these classes were generally freshmen or very early in their college careers. College freshmen and undergrads just starting college are populations often targeted in loneliness studies because the transition into college, be it from high school, military service, etc., can often be a difficult one that results in higher levels of loneliness. Additionally, moving away from home and beginning a new stage of life can result in changes in one's amount and quality of social support. This study aimed to collect this information for the purposes of identifying the prevalence of the undergrad's perceived loneliness and social support as well as identify how, if at all, various demographic groups suffer differently from loneliness and lack of social support.

In order to accomplish this goal, this study collected data from undergrads enrolled in 2000-level courses in the Sociology Department, typically populated by college freshmen. Data was collected in the form of an online, anonymous survey, consisting of five types of questions, resulting in 36 questions total. The survey contained five demographic questions, five questions relating to Hirschi's Social Bonds Theory (the conceptual framework for this study), eight questions from the Revised UCLA Loneliness Survey (ULS-8) (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987) that assessed loneliness, twelve questions from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) that assessed social support, and six open-ended questions.

There were a few potential limits of this study. The participants for this study were all recruited from 2000-level courses in the Sociology Department of Western Michigan University. The results were collected from an online survey, without random selection of participants. Because of these limits, the results of this study are not be able to be generalized to the entire student population. Additionally, data was only collected at one point in the student's college

career. It was not clear whether the students in the study happen to be in a particularly difficult part of the semester, or what, if any, trends may have occurred throughout the rest of the student's time at college. Finally, due to the study only examining five demographic characteristics, there may have been some demographic groups with higher loneliness that this study missed. These limits will be addressed more in the Conclusion section of this study.

With all this considered, the potential benefits of this study outweigh any limits. The information gained from this study is important for the university to know for several reasons. First, many studies have found that loneliness is an issue for "a significant proportion of the population" (West, Kellner, & Moore-West, 1986). Also, the age group that experiences the most loneliness is adolescence to college-age (West, Kellner, & Moore-West, 1986; Polack, 2018). Additionally, studies have found loneliness to have a relationship with depression (West, Kellner, & Moore-West, 1986; Cacioppo et al., 2000) as well as suicide (Ozawa-de Silva, 2020). The university should have an interest in their student's mental health as it contributes to the student's well-being. Lastly, loneliness has been found to help influence decisions of college attrition (Tinto, 1993). With these findings, not only is there an ethical motivation to examining loneliness, there are also financial and educational motivations.

Loneliness and Social Support in College Students

To begin, having a definition for loneliness is essential for studying loneliness. Examining loneliness in people can be a challenging task because loneliness is not an easily recordable emotion. Primary emotions such as joy, anger, fear, etc. can be more easily observed by monitoring blood pressure, heart-rate, and other physiological changes, whereas loneliness is a perceived experience. Basically, this means that loneliness changes from person to person and circumstances that may cause one person to feel lonely, may not elicit the same response from another person. The majority of researchers agree on three key components of what makes someone truly feel lonely (West, Kellner, & Moore-West, 1986). The first of the components is that loneliness results from perceived deficiencies in a person's social relationships. The keyword here is "perceived". As mentioned, loneliness is an emotion everyone experiences differently. Circumstances in which one person feels lonely, another person may be perfectly content. Next, loneliness is a subjective experience and is not synonymous with social isolation. Not being around people is not the same as experiencing loneliness. Some people are much more comfortable being by themselves or with very few others. Lastly, it is an unpleasant and distressing experience. Again, someone can spend the majority of their time not interacting with others, but if this is not distressing to the person, they are not lonely. Once more, the three key components of a loneliness definition are that it is based on perception, it is not the same as social isolation, and it is unpleasant. With these basic components established, researchers can move forward with a generalized definition of loneliness.

Vanhalst, et al. (2012) mentions that studies have found the transition to college to be a particularly useful time to study loneliness due to the instability of this period in student's lives. These findings are also found in other literature, for existence, Page & Cole (1991) and O'Donnell & Rudavsky (2018). College freshmen often find themselves in completely novel environments without their previous familiar comforts of parents, siblings, friends, etc. Since

many freshmen are, more or less, starting over in a new social environment, it can be challenging to maintain quality relationships at first (Vanhalst, et al., 2012). Studies such as Tinto's 1993 study into college freshmen have argued the importance of quality peer relationships for a student's ability to properly integrate into their new college environments. These relationships form social support for the student and provide resources that can assist in combating loneliness.

A study completed by Cigna, a global health service company, which surveyed 20,000 US adults 18 and older, examined the prevalence of loneliness in the US (Polack, 2018). Cigna used the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a scale frequently used in research to measure loneliness, in their study. The study had interesting results regarding the amount of loneliness in US adults. First, the study upheld that the age group which suffers the most from loneliness are adults ages 18-22 (Polack, 2018), the same age group as most college freshmen and undergrads starting college. In addition to this finding, nearly half of the respondents reported "sometimes or always feeling alone (46 percent) or left out (47 percent)." (Polack, 2018) Additionally, one in five respondents reported that they "rarely or never feel close to people." (Polack, 2018) Lastly, the same study (Polack, 2018) also found that two in five respondents "sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful". This study supplies some data for just how prevalent loneliness is in the United States. Although limits or biases in this study are possible, these statistics show that loneliness is a problem for a significant portion of the population, especially younger adults.

Social support is a topic that has been found to be significantly related to loneliness (Cacioppo, et al., 2000; Jackson, Soderlind, & Weiss, 2000; Nicpon, et al., 2006). Specifically, more social support has been found to result in less loneliness (Shaw & Gant, 2004; Nicpon, et al., 2006; Salimi, & Bozorgpour, 2012). Like loneliness, social support has many different definitions, depending on the context it is in. However, researchers are generally in agreement about the meaning of social support. Social support describes "assistance in the form of advice, information, emotional sustenance, material resources, or exchanges of reassurance provided through relationships that are available." (Vietze, 2011) Broken down, that definition means that social support is when an individual receives a social stimulus from another person they have an established relationship with. One addition to that definition is that social support occurs when the individual perceives the stimulus/interaction as helpful (Vietze, 2011).

Social support is also similar to loneliness in the sense that it is a perceived experience (Vietze, 2011). The interaction must be viewed as helpful to be considered social support (Vietze, 2011), often resulting in social support being referred to as perceived social support. Perceived social support can occur through face-to-face interactions as well as through interaction over the phone or social media (Vietze, 2011).

Perceived social support is not all the same and does have different facets. For example, according to Vietze (2011), perceived social support is characterized along three distinct dimensions, with the first dimension being the source of support. Sources of support can be obvious, like family and friends, but can also include coworkers, peers, bosses, coaches, teachers, religious leaders, or anyone that a person has an established relationship with. The second dimension is the type of support. Is the support emotional or material? Emotional support

can include advice and guidance, whereas material support can include resources such as money, or other stimuli that can assist the individual. Finally, the last dimension is the quality of support. The more the individual finds the support helpful and easy to understand, the higher the quality of the support. With social support being so closely related to loneliness, it is important and logical to examine it in this study as well.

The demographic characteristic of gender has mixed results when compared to loneliness. Some studies discussed in West, Kellner, & Moore-West (1986) have found no significant differences between perceived loneliness in males and females. One other study with this finding, not included in West, Kellner, & Moore-West (1986) is Maliwanag (2002). However, other studies have found that women report feeling lonely more than men do (Page & Cole, 1991). Additionally, West, Kellner, & Moore-West (1986), in their review of the literature on loneliness, found that generally, during younger ages, women report more loneliness, but later in life, especially when marital status is considered, unmarried men report more loneliness than unmarried women. In addressing gender and perceived social support, a couple studies (Hogan et al., 2010; Kendler, Myers, & Prescott, 2005) have found that females report more perceived social support than males. However, what is difficult to analyze is that some studies have found gender differences in regard to specific sources of perceived social support. For example, Dalgard et al. (2006) found no significant gender differences in support from parents and spouses. At the same time, this study (Dalgard et al., 2006) did find that women report more support than men from siblings, children, friends, neighbors, and relatives. As discussed, social support comes from many different sources, so it is possible that the amount of perceived social support dedicated to various genders would vary by source.

The relationship status characteristic has more clear findings. West, Kellner, & Moore-West (1986) mention that Russel, while developing the UCLA Loneliness Scale discovered that college undergraduates that were married or dating regularly reported less loneliness than those who were not. Similar findings are also included in Maliwanag (2002) and Page & Cole (1991), which found students who are married or have romantic partners are less lonely than divorced, separated, or single students. For perceived social support, there is little research available on the differences between various relationship statuses and perceived social support. Although, through speculation only, it would make sense for persons in a relationship, as long as the relationship is healthy, to report more perceived social support than those not in a relationship.

Considering the relationship between race and loneliness, there is not a lot of data as well. One study (Maliwanag, 2002) found that Caucasians reported lower loneliness than students of other races. Still, other studies (Page & Cole, 1991) have found race to not be a predictor of loneliness. When examining perceived social support and race, a couple studies (Maton et al., 1996; Rees, Karter, & Young, 2010), found there to be no significant differences between race and perceived social support. One other study (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002) had findings similar to Dalgard et al. (2006) had in the sense that Hinderlie & Kenny (2006) found various races to benefit differently from different sources of social support. For example, they (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2006) found that, on predominately white campuses, black students may benefit more from strong family social support in addition to peer social support, perhaps due to

feelings of exclusion. Lastly, a study by Griffin et al. (2006) found that white, specifically female, respondents report more friend social support, while black female respondents reported more family social support.

The RSO and Greek life characteristic also does not have a ton of research conducted on it but, intuitively, should have an influence on loneliness and perceived social support. A Registered Student Organization, or RSO, is an organization created by students at Western Michigan University. There are many groups available, covering a wide range of topics. These groups offer students the opportunity to unite over shared interests and meet new people. If Tinto's (1993) theory on person-environment bonds reducing college attrition is to be believed, a bond such as membership in an RSO and/or a Fraternity/Sorority should serve as a bond to the student's college environment. One study by Mattanah et al. (2012) sought, among other things, to determine if a social support program for college freshmen would improve the student's academic achievement. They found that a peer-led intervention program serves to improve student's network of peer support and did improve their academic achievement. RSOs and Fraternities/Sororities could provide at least somewhat similar social support that the intervention program mentioned in the previous study did. In addition, a study by Hinderlie & Kenny (2002), found that involvement in campus organizations is associated with support and college adjustment.

Lastly, on-campus v/s off-campus living arrangements could have similar effects to the RSO and Greek life characteristic. One study (Nicpon, et al., 2006) examined the characteristic of living arrangements in their study on loneliness, social support, and academic persistence. They found that "Students who lived on campus... tended to report more positive academic persistence decisions and social support... than those who lived off campus" (Nicpon, et al., 2006).

Conceptual Framework

Concerning the conceptual framework for this study, Hirschi's Social Bond Theory could provide some explanation for the issues involved with loneliness, especially for young college undergrads. Additionally, "social bonds" can compare to social support in the sense that they provide comfort and interaction with stimuli outside of an individual's person. Hirschi's theory seeks to explain socialization of young people, primarily adolescents. Hirschi argues that adolescents who don't have bonds to the environment they are in are more likely to participate in acts of delinquency or deviancy (Hirschi, 1969). Yes, Hirschi's theory may be based on adolescents, but college-age students, especially freshmen and undergrads early on in college, have only recently left the "adolescence" age group. In fact, with many of them still being dependent on their families for some form of college support, 73.6% according to a study of just under 3000 white and black families with children who attended college by Henretta, Wolf, Van Voorhis, & Soldo (2012), it is not entirely unreasonable to apply the main concepts of Hirschi's theory of socialization of adolescents, to the socialization, or lack thereof, of new college-age students. With freshmen entering college and having little to no bonds with the environment, it is important that they develop bonds to prevent engaging in deviant acts.

Hirschi (1969) describes four types of bonds people must feel with their environment in order to prevent engaging in deviancy. These types of bonds are attachment, commitment, belief, and involvement (Hirschi, 1969). One of Hirschi's bonds that applies heavily to the topics of loneliness and social support in college is attachment. As explained by Tinto (1993), developing personal attachments to others (i.e.: friends, roommates, faculty, members of student organizations, or Greek life brothers/sisters) is one of, if not the most important part of fighting loneliness as a college undergrad. Hirschi's (1969) commitment bond may be somewhat obvious for college students: money. For college students, their commitment bond for not engaging in deviancy at college is that they will lose money that themselves and/or their families have invested in their college education. Hirschi's (1969) belief bond simply refers to whether or not the student believes that their being in college and earning a degree will be beneficial to them. If they do not have this belief, they will possess less bonds with their environment and be more likely to engage in deviancy. Finally, the other social bond that most closely relates to loneliness and social support in college is the involvement bond. This bond is determined by how much time the student spends engaging in conventional college activities. The more time they spend engaging in these activities, the less time they'll spend engaging in deviant acts.

Before going further, it is important to specify "deviant acts" for college-age students, since college is a time where deviant acts, as defined by mass society, are approved and even encouraged. For example, underage alcohol consumption, binge drinking, drug use, and multiple sexual relationships are all behaviors that college students engage in that their peers would not feel are deviant. With that considered, the question remains of what counts as deviant acts for college undergrads? One of the biggest deviant acts would be attrition, or leaving college. Tinto's 1993 study looks at the topic of college attrition and has findings that are similar to Hirschi's (1969) findings from Social Bond Theory. Tinto also finds that it is a person-environment fit that influences student's decisions to remain in college or not. In particular, Tinto (1993) stresses the importance for students to develop satisfying relationships with peers and to sufficiently integrate with their college environment. If these goals are not met, students are more likely to withdraw from the university (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) focus on peer relationships and sufficient integration with the environment are topics that are similar to Hirschi's (1969) focus on developing bonds with one's environment to prevent deviant behavior.

Not participating in social interaction at college could also be seen as deviant behavior for young college students. College is meant to be a social environment, so, not engaging socially with one's peers could appear as deviant behavior. Keeping Hirschi's (1969) Social Bonds Theory in mind, if undergrads do not form strong social bonds with Western's college environment, this will lead to them being poorly socialized and being less resistant to engaging in deviancy. This deviancy could come in any of the forms mentioned above, or in other forms not addressed, and may result in not forming a satisfying person-environment fit, as described by Tinto (1993). This lack of fit may then lead to increased feelings of poor perceived social support, loneliness, and may result in withdrawal from the university environment.

Methods

The primary goal of this study was to examine the prevalence of perceived loneliness and perceived social support in a sample of undergrads in 2000-level classes in the Sociology Department at Western Michigan University. This information could be important for the University, especially the Sindecuse Health Center (the on-campus physical and mental health clinic available to students) to know regarding students starting college. In addition to the primary goal, this study also sought to determine what effect, if any, membership in the five demographic categories examined had on perceived loneliness and perceived social support. This information could prove useful because if certain members of a demographic group report feeling more loneliness and lack of social support than others, the University could start programs that better accommodates those specific groups.

Based off of the information gathered from the literature on loneliness and perceived social support, this survey developed six hypotheses that it tested using the data collected.

H1: Perceived social support will be negatively correlated with perceived loneliness.

H2: Females will report greater perceived social support than males.

H3: There will be no significant difference of perceived loneliness between various races.

H4: Persons who are married, engaged, or dating consistently will report more social support than those who are not.

H5: Persons with membership in RSOs and Fraternities/Sororities will report more social support than those who are not.

H6: Low levels of Hirschi's social bonds will be positively correlated with high scores of loneliness.*

In order to collect the data to answer these hypotheses, this study used an anonymous, online survey. The survey for this study consisted of five types of questions: demographic questions, Hirschi's social bond questions, loneliness questions, social support questions, as well as some open-ended questions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The five demographic questions addressed the five different demographic characteristics that this study examined, which were gender, race, relationship status, membership in an RSO and/or Greek life, and on v/s off campus residency. The questions were all nominal questions which asked respondents to select which option they best identified with. The gender, race, and relationship questions also each had an "Other" option which allowed respondents to write in an answer if they did not identify with any of the options provided.

*Note that the Hirschi social bonds questions were scored with the higher the score, the fewer social bonds the respondent has (I.E.: If a respondent selected "Strongly Disagree" to one of the bonds questions, that response was scored as "5".) This means that "low levels" of Hirschi's social bonds mean that having fewer bonds is positively correlated with more loneliness. This will be explained again later in the study.

The membership and residency questions did not include the “Other” option because, for the purposes of this study, respondents either were or weren’t involved in these activities and lived either on or off campus.

HIRSCHI’S SOCIAL BONDS

To measure a respondent’s social bonds as described by Hirschi (1969), this study included five ordinal, multiple choice questions with response options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The responses were scored as SD=5, D=4, Neutral=3, A=2, SA=1. The higher the score, the less social bonds the respondent had. The questions each asked about a social bond put forth by Hirschi (1969). One question asked about the respondent’s attachment to others, one question asked about the respondent’s commitment to their degree, one question asked about the respondent’s belief of the importance of obtaining a college degree, and the last two questions asked about the respondent’s involvement in the university. One of these questions asked about the respondent’s academic involvement and one asked about the respondent’s social involvement. This last social bond was split into two questions because it is possible to be part of only one side of the college environment (the academic side or the social side) and two questions allowed for more specification of responses and less confusion for the respondents.

LONELINESS

To assess loneliness, this study used the USL-8 (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987), which is an 8-question survey that comes from the original 20-question version (USL-20) of the UCLA Loneliness Scale. This study decided to use the USL-8 instead of the ULS-20 in order to reduce survey fatigue. While there is a shorter, 4-question version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (USL-4), the creators of the USL-8 (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987) found that their 8-question version could serve as an excellent middle ground between the other two in regard to both respondent burden and quality of data collected. The ULS-8 was found to have high correlation with the ULS-20 ($r = .91$) (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987). Due to these reasons, the ULS-8 was determined to be the most useful for what was being assessed in this study. The questions on the ULS-8 asked about how isolated and alone the respondent felt and their responses were scored to determine their level of loneliness

The questions on the ULS-20, the survey from which the ULS-8 was generated, were all ordinal questions with four response options; Never, Rarely, Sometimes, and Often. The responses were scored as Never=1, Rarely=2, Sometimes=3, and Often=4. Out of the eight questions on the ULS-8, two were reverse scored with Never=4, Rarely=3, Sometimes=2, and Often=1. Scoring was kept on a continuous basis and the higher the score, the higher level of the respondent’s loneliness (Russel, et al., 1978).

SOCIAL SUPPORT

To assess social support, this study used the MSPSS, or Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), which is a 12-question survey with questions addressing three subgroups of sources of social support: friends, family, and significant others. This survey was chosen partially because other studies (Griffin et al., 2006;

Nicpon, et al., 2006; Vanhalst, et al., 2012) have discussed the difference and importance of both family social support and friend social support. The MSPSS looks at both of these types of social support. Additionally, the MSPSS seemed especially beneficial to this study because of its inclusion of significant other social support. Because this study sought to examine if there is an influence between relationship status and loneliness for the respondents surveyed, the inclusion of significant other social support found in the MSPSS seemed logical.

The twelve questions on the MSPSS include four that address family social support, four that address friend social support, and four that address significant other social support. All of the questions were ordinal questions with seven provided response options ranging from Very Strongly Disagree to Very Strongly Agree. The responses were scored as: VSD (Very Strongly Disagree)=1, SD=2, D=3, N=4, A=5, SA=6, VSA=7. The higher the score, the higher level of perceived social support the respondent has (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988).

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Lastly, this study included six open ended questions. Four of the questions asked about the impact of the respondent's gender, race, relationship status, and RSO/Greek life membership demographic characteristics on the respondent's life, one question asked about how the respondent's family impacts their life, and one question asked about how the respondent's friends impact their life. No separate questions about the respondent's significant other were asked because that was included in the relationship status question. No separate question was included for the living arrangements characteristic as this study did not deem a question over this would be beneficial to the respondent.

These six questions are important and beneficial to this study as it gives the respondents an opportunity to explain, in their own words, why and/or how the various characteristics studied affect their lives. This study felt, due to the personal nature of topics like loneliness and social support, it was only appropriate to allow respondents to provide their own interpretations and experiences involving the various demographic characteristics and social support systems this study is examining.

Results

RESPONDENTS

The survey received 84 responses between January 13, 2020 through February 3, 2020. Of the 84 responses, 83 respondents answered the set of demographic questions, with one respondent leaving them blank. The 83 respondents are broken down by demographic groups in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	n	%	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance
Sex	83	100%	1.66	.47	.22
Male	28	33.73%			
Female	55	66.27%			
Other	0	0%			
Race	83	100%	1.24	.51	.26
White	66	79.52%			
Black	14	16.87%			
Hispanic	3	3.61%			
Asian	0	0%			
Middle-Eastern	0	0%			
Pacific Islander	0	0%			
Other	0	0%			
Relationship Status	83	100%	1.54	.84	.71
Single	46	55.42%			
Dating	34	40.96%			
Engaged	1	1.20%			
Married	1	1.20%			
Divorced	0	0%			
Widowed	0	0%			
Other	1	1.20%			
RSO/Greek Life Membership	83	100%	1.64	.48	.23
Involved	30	36.14%			
Uninvolved	53	63.86%			

Table 1(Cont.)

Characteristic	n	%	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance
<i>On-campus v/s*</i>					
<i>Off-Campus</i>	83	100%	1.61	.49	.24
On-Campus	32	38.55%			
Off-Campus	51	61.45%			

* It is important to note that, especially for freshmen or undergrads in low level classes, “off-campus” could mean living at home with family or having independent living arrangements, such as an apartment, townhouse, etc. Although not possible with this study due to time restraints, future studies may benefit from attempting to separate off-campus living arrangements between living with family and living independently.

PERCIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND LONELINESS

Both the perceived social support and perceived loneliness statistics were broken down into three categories based off of their total score from the MSPSS and ULS-8. The three categories were low, moderate, and high. The range of scores for these categories were determined by taking the highest possible score (84 for the MSPSS and 32 for the ULS-8) since it is impossible to score above that, subtracting the lowest possible score (12 for the MSPSS and 8 for ULS-8) since it is impossible to score below that, and then dividing the left over number by 3 to create the range of the three categories. For the MSPSS, low perceived social support was a score between 12 and 36, moderate perceived social support was a score between 37 and 60, and high perceived social support was a score between 61 and 84. For the ULS-8, low perceived loneliness was a score between 8 and 16, moderate perceived loneliness was a score between 17 and 24, and high perceived loneliness was a score between 25 and 32. Two respondents who answered the demographic characteristic questions failed to answer the perceived social support questions and three respondents who answered the demographic characteristic questions failed to answer the loneliness questions. *Table 2* shows these results.

Table 2: *Perceived Social Support and Perceived Loneliness among the Respondents*

Characteristic	n	%	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance
<i>Social Support</i>	81	100%	2.75	.43	.19
High	61	75.31%			
Moderate	20	24.69%			
Low	0	0%			
<i>Loneliness</i>	80	100%	1.69	.64	.41
High	8	10%			
Moderate	39	48.75%			
Low	33	41.25%			

HIRSCHI'S SOCIAL BONDS:

Table 3 shows the responses to the five Hirschi Social Bonds questions. Table 3 first separates the five questions of attachment, commitment, belief, academic involvement and social involvement and then separates each question by demographic characteristic and the percentage of respondents who chose each response option. There is one less respondent in Hirschi Social Bonds questions than the demographic questions, as one respondent did not answer these questions.

Table 3: *Hirschi's Social Bonds by Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Characteristic	SD	D	N	A	SA
Attachment (“I feel a strong, personal connection to one or more persons at this campus.”)					
Sex					
(n=28) Male	0%	7.14%	0%	50%	42.86%
(n=54) Female	1.85%	12.96%	7.41%	37.04%	40.74%
Race					
(n=65) White	0%	12.31%	3.08%	43.08%	41.54%
(n=14) Black	7.14%	7.14%	14.29%	35.71%	35.71%
(n=3) Hispanic	0%	0%	0%	33.33%	66.67%
Relationship Status					
(n=45) Single	2.22%	8.89%	6.67%	44.44%	37.78%
(n=34) Dating	0%	11.76%	2.94%	38.24%	47.06%
(n=1) Engaged	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
(n=1) Married	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
(n=1) Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RSO/Greek Life Membership					
(n=30) Involved	0%	3.33%	3.33%	46.67%	46.67%
(n=52) Uninvolved	1.92%	15.38%	5.77%	38.46%	38.46%
On-Campus v/s Off-Campus					
(n=32) On-Campus	0%	9.38%	3.13%	43.75%	43.75%
(n=50) Off-Campus	2%	12%	6%	40%	40%

Table 3 (Cont.)

Characteristic	SD	D	N	A	SA
Commitment (“I feel committed to finishing my college degree.”)					
Sex					
(n=28) Male	0%	0%	0%	14.29%	85.71%
(n=54) Female	0%	0%	3.70%	18.52%	77.78%
Race					
(n=65) White	0%	0%	3.08%	16.92%	80%
(n=14) Black	0%	0%	0%	21.43%	78.57%
(n=3) Hispanic	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Relationship Status					
(n=45) Single	0%	0%	4.44%	20%	75.56%
(n=34) Dating	0%	0%	0%	14.71%	85.29%
(n=1) Engaged	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
(n=1) Married	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
(n=1) Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RSO/Greek Life Membership					
(n=30) Involved	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
(n=52) Uninvolved	0%	0%	3.85%	21.15%	75%
On-Campus v/s Off-Campus					
(n=32) On-Campus	0%	0%	0%	9.38%	90.63%
(n=50) Off-Campus	0%	0%	4%	22%	74%
Belief (“I believe that obtaining a college degree will be beneficial to my future.”)					
Sex					
(n=28) Male	0%	0%	0%	14.29%	85.71%
(n=54) Female	0%	0%	1.85%	18.52%	79.63%

Table 3 (Cont.)

Characteristic	SD	D	N	A	SA
Race					
(n=65) White	0%	0%	0%	16.92%	83.08%
(n=14) Black	0%	0%	7.14%	21.43%	71.43%
(n=3) Hispanic	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Relationship Status					
(n=45) Single	0%	0%	2.22%	20%	77.78%
(n=34) Dating	0%	0%	0%	11.76%	88.24%
(n=1) Engaged	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
(n=1) Married	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
(n=1) Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RSO/Greek Life Membership					
(n=30) Involved	0%	0%	0%	6.67%	93.33%
(n=52) Uninvolved	0%	0%	1.92%	23.08%	75%
On-Campus v/s Off-Campus					
(n=32) On-Campus	0%	0%	0%	15.63%	84.38%
(n=50) Off-Campus	0%	0%	2%	18%	80%
<i>Involvement-Academic</i> (“I feel involved at Western academically.”)					
Sex					
(n=28) Male	0%	0%	14.29%	46.43%	39.29%
(n=54) Female	1.85%	7.41%	16.67%	44.44%	29.63%
Race					
(n=65) White	1.54%	0%	16.92%	49.23%	32.31%
(n=14) Black	0%	28.57%	7.14%	28.57%	35.71%
(n=3) Hispanic	0%	0%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%
Relationship Status					
(n=45) Single	0%	9.89%	20%	42.22%	28.89%

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Table 3 (Cont.)

Characteristic	SD	D	N	A	SA
(n=34) Dating	8.82%	0%	2.94%	50%	38.24%
(n=1) Engaged	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
(n=1) Married	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
(n=1) Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RSO/Greek Life Membership					
(n=30) Involved	0%	0%	3.33%	46.67%	50%
(n=52) Uninvolved	1.92%	7.69%	23.08%	44.23%	23.08%
On-Campus v/s Off-Campus					
(n=32) On-Campus	0%	0%	18.75%	46.88%	34.38%
(n=50) Off-Campus	2%	8%	14%	44%	32%
<i>Involvement-Social</i> (“I feel involved at Western socially.”)					
Sex					
(n=28) Male	0%	14.29%	21.43%	42.86%	21.43%
(n=54) Female	9.26%	22.22%	18.52%	38.89%	11.11%
Race					
(n=65) White	4.62%	18.46%	20%	40%	16.92%
(n=14) Black	14.29%	21.43%	21.43%	35.71%	7.14%
(n=3) Hispanic	0%	33.33%	0%	66.67%	0%
Relationship Status					
(n=45) Single	6.67%	24.44%	17.78%	40%	11.11%
(n=34) Dating	2.94%	11.76%	23.53%	44.12%	17.65%
(n=1) Engaged	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
(n=1) Married	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
(n=1) Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RSO/Greek Life Membership					
(n=30) Involved	3.33%	6.67%	10%	56.67%	23.33%

Table 3 (Cont.)

Characteristic	SD	D	N	A	SA
(n=52) Uninvolved	7.69%	26.92%	25%	30.77%	9.62%
On-Campus v/s Off-Campus					
(n=32) On-Campus	3.13%	15.63%	25%	40.63%	15.63%
(n=50) Off-Campus	8%	22%	16%	40%	14%

One interesting outcome to note of these results are the differences between the responses to the attachment/involvement questions and the commitment/belief questions. The overall responses for the commitment and belief questions are much higher on the “Agree” half (Agree and Strongly Agree) than the attachment and involvement questions. For example, the commitment and belief questions have 0% of respondents selecting “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” across all demographic groups. Add on to that, very few respondents (all less than 10%) chose “neither agree or disagree” for the commitment and belief questions. The vast majority of respondents (greater than 90% for all demographic groups) either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the commitment and belief questions, whereas the attachment and both types of involvement questions receive more respondents selecting “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, and “Neither Agree or Disagree”. More testing would need to be done to determine if any of these results have any significant meaning.

Through speculation, in a purely post-hoc fashion, it is possible that the higher agreement among the commitment and belief questions may be due to the financial and optional nature of a college education. Respondents may feel more committed to completing their college degrees because their families as well as themselves have payed money for them to be there. They may also believe that obtaining their degree will be beneficial to their future as, unlike kindergarten-high school, college is not required education. Because of this, there may be a higher chance that the respondents are at college because they want to be (with possible exceptions). Additionally, a bit of respondent bias may be occurring here. Since the survey that this study used was completely voluntary, it is possible that the respondents who chose to take part in the survey, may have higher commitment and more similar beliefs with Western than respondents who chose not to respond. It may be entirely possible that these results are due to a poor sample as well. It is also interesting the number of respondents selecting “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, and “Neither Agree or Disagree” for the attachment and both involvement questions. With such high perceived social support, this study was surprised that the results of these questions are not higher on the “Agree” side. Again, these speculations are simply possibilities this study considered post-hoc while examining the results of this study. More testing would need to be done to determine if any of these results are significant.

HYPOTHESIS #1

	<i>Social Support</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>
Social Support	1	
Loneliness	0.593302805	1

4.A

Hypothesis #1 stated that “Perceived social support will be negatively correlated with perceived loneliness.” A correlational test (Image 4.A) was conducted comparing perceived social support with perceived loneliness resulting in a moderate, positive correlation of $r=+.593$. Due to this result, this survey concludes that, with this sample, loneliness and social support do not have a negative correlation, but instead have a moderate, positive correlation.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>Perceived Social Support</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>
Mean	27.18518519	17.8625
Variance	115.5777778	21.2846519
Observations	81	80
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	109	
t Stat	7.165057581	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00	
t Critical one-tail	1.658953458	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00	
t Critical two-tail	1.98196749	

4.B

A post-hoc two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances with a .05 alpha level was conducted to determine if this result was significant (Image 4.B). The test resulted in a p-value of 0.00, a t-stat of 7.17, and a one-tailed t-Critical value of 1.66. Due to this result, this survey concluded that, with this sample, the correlation is significant.

HYPOTHESIS #2

	<i>Female Social Support</i>	<i>Male Social Support</i>
Mean	68.03703704	65.48275862
Variance	201.9231307	275.044335
Observations	54	29
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	50	
t Stat	0.702414237	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.242839121	
t Critical one-tail	1.675905025	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.485678243	
t Critical two-tail	2.008559112	

4.C

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Hypothesis #2 stated that “Females will report greater perceived social support than males.” With a null hypothesis of $H_0: \mu_1 \geq \mu_2$; $H_1: \mu_1 < \mu_2$ (μ_1 : male, μ_2 : female), a two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances with an alpha level of .05 (Image 4.C) was conducted and resulted in a .702 t-Stat and a one-tailed t-Crit value of 1.68, as well as a .24 one-tailed P-value. Because the P-value is greater than the chosen alpha level of .05 and the t-Stat is smaller than the one-tailed t-Crit value, this study concluded that, with this sample, females do not report greater perceived social support than males.

HYPOTHESIS #3

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
White	66	66	1	0		
White (L)	66	1125	17.0455	31.61328671		
Black	14	28	2	0		
Black (L)	14	235	16.7857	33.71978022		
Hispanic	3	9	3	0		
Hispanic (L)	3	69	23	3		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	10718.1	5	2143.62	137.2342037	0.00	2.270667495
Within Groups	2499.22	160	15.6201			
Total	13217.3	165				

4.D

Hypothesis #3 stated that “There will be no significant difference of perceived loneliness between various races.” With a null hypothesis of $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$; $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2 \neq \mu_3$ (μ_1 : White/Caucasian, μ_2 : Black/African American μ_3 : Hispanic/Latinx), an ANOVA single factor test with an alpha level of .05 (Image 4.D) was conducted and resulted in a 0.00 P-value as well as a 137.23 F-value and a 2.27 F-crit value. Since the P-value is less than the .05 alpha level and since the F-value is greater than the F-crit value, this study concluded that, with this sample, there is a significant difference between various races and perceived loneliness.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances			t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances			t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	White (L)	Black (L)		White (L)	Hispanic (L)		Black (L)	Hispanic (L)
Mean	17.04545	16.78571429	Mean	17.04545455	23	Mean	16.78571	23
Variance	31.61329	33.71978022	Variance	31.61328671	3	Variance	33.71978	3
Observations	66	14	Observations	66	3	Observations	14	3
Hypothesized Mean	0		Hypothesized Mean	0		Hypothesized Mean	0	
df	19		df	4		df	12	
t Stat	0.152853		t Stat	-4.896278524		t Stat	-3.36594	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.440063		P(T<=t) one-tail	0.004032769		P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002806	
t Critical one-tail	1.729133		t Critical one-tail	2.131846786		t Critical one-tail	1.782288	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.880126		P(T<=t) two-tail	0.008065537		P(T<=t) two-tail	0.005612	
t Critical two-tail	2.093024		t Critical two-tail	2.776445105		t Critical two-tail	2.178813	

4.E

4.F

4.G

Because of these results, three separate t-test assuming unequal variances (Images 4.E-4.G) were conducted to attempt to find where the difference(s) occurred. The tests that yielded a significant difference was the second test: White/Caucasian v/s Hispanic/Latinx respondents (Image 4.F), and the third test: Black/African American v/s Hispanic/Latinx respondents (Image 4.G).

Image 4.F shows the t-test results for comparing loneliness scores of White/Caucasian respondents against Hispanic/Latinx respondents. The test resulted in a t-Stat of -4.9 and a two-tailed t-Critical value of +/- 2.78, as well as a two-tailed P-value of .008. Since the t-Stat value of -4.9 is outside the two-tailed t-Critical range of +/- 2.78 and the two-tailed P-value of .008 is less than the alpha level of .05, this study concluded that there was a significant difference between the loneliness levels of White/Caucasian respondents and Hispanic/Latinx respondents.

Image 4.G shows the t-test results for comparing loneliness scores of Black/African American respondents against Hispanic/Latinx respondents. The test resulted in a t-Stat value of -3.37 and a two-tailed t-Critical value of +/- 2.18, as well as a two-tailed P-value of .006. Since the t-Stat value of -3.37 is outside the two-tailed t-Critical range of +/- 2.18 and the two-tailed P-value of .006 is less than the alpha level of .05, this study concluded that there was a significant difference between the loneliness levels of Black/African American respondents and Hispanic/Latinx respondents.

However, as discussed more in the Conclusion, it is possible that these results could be skewed due to the low level of Hispanic/Latinx respondents.

HYPOTHESIS #4

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Single	45	45	1	0		
Single Social Support	45	2922	64.93333	116.5182		
Dating	34	68	2	0		
Dating Social Support	34	2512	73.88235	76.47059		
Engaged	1	3	3	#DIV/0!		
Engaged Social Support	1	63	63	#DIV/0!		
Married	1	4	4	#DIV/0!		
Married Social Support	1	76	76	#DIV/0!		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	185215.4	7	26459.34	532.6227	0.00	2.069512
Within Groups	7650.329	154	49.67746			
Total	192865.7	161				

4.H

Hypothesis #4 stated that “Persons who are married, engaged, or dating consistently will report more social support than those who are not.” With a null hypothesis of $H_0: \mu_2, \mu_3, \mu_4 \leq \mu_1$; $H_1: \mu_2, \mu_3, \mu_4 > \mu_1$ (μ_1 : single, μ_2 : committed relationship, μ_3 : engaged, μ_4 : married), an ANOVA single factor test with an alpha level of .05 (Image 4.H) was conducted and resulted in

a 0.00 P-value as well as a 532.62 F-value and a 2.07 F-crit value. Since the P-value is less than the .05 alpha level and since the F-value is greater than the F-crit value, it would seem that, with this sample, there is a significant difference between relationship status and perceived social support.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>Dating Social Support</i>	<i>Single Social Support</i>
Mean	0.002395671	0.002786655
Variance	0.179398909	0.185828537
Observations	1048558	1048569
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	2096476	
t Stat	-0.662482808	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.253830961	
t Critical one-tail	1.644854354	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.507661922	
t Critical two-tail	1.959965116	

4.I

Unfortunately, due to insufficient data, this study cannot determine between which groups the significant difference occurred. Further data on engaged and married persons within this group would need to be collected to determine where the significant difference occurred. However, a t-test assuming unequal variances and an alpha level of .05 (Image 4.I) was conducted comparing the perceived social support of respondents who were dating consistently with that of single respondents. This test resulted in a t-stat of -.66, a two-tailed t-critical value of +/-1.96, and a two-tail p-value of .508. Since the t-stat of -.66 is not within the two-tailed t-critical values of +/-1.96, this study concluded that there is no significant difference between perceived social support of single respondents and dating consistently respondents. That leaves the significant difference to exist between married and engaged respondents with single respondents. However, due to the issues with lack of diversity of respondents and, therefore, the inability to conduct the necessary tests to determine a significant difference, this study concluded that this hypothesis had inconclusive results.

HYPOTHESIS #5

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>Yes SS</i>	<i>No SS</i>
Mean	69.25806452	68.52
Variance	119.6645161	116.0506122
Observations	31	50
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	63	
t Stat	0.296865279	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.383772968	
t Critical one-tail	1.669402222	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.767545935	
t Critical two-tail	1.998340543	

4.J

Hypothesis #5 stated that “Persons with membership in RSOs and Fraternities/Sororities will report more social support than those who are not.” With a null hypothesis of $H_0: \mu_1 \leq \mu_2$; $H_1: \mu_1 > \mu_2$ (μ_1 : yes, involved, μ_2 : no, uninvolved), a two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances with a .05 alpha level (Image 4.J) was conducted comparing the social support of respondents involved in an RSO or Greek life and the social support of respondents uninvolved in these groups. This test resulted a t-Stat of .297 and a one-tailed t-Critical value of 1.697 as well as a one-tailed P-value of .38. Since the t-Stat is less than one-tailed t-Critical value, and since the one-tailed P-value is greater than the chosen alpha level of .05, this study concluded that, with this sample, Membership in an RSO/Greek life does not lead to greater perceived social support.

HYPOTHESIS #6

	<i>Hirschi</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>
Hirschi	1	
Loneliness	0.566942	1

4.K

Hypothesis #6 stated that “Low levels of Hirschi’s social bonds will be positively correlated with high scores of loneliness.” Based off how the respondent’s results were scored, the less social bonds the respondent has, the higher the total score on Hirschi’s Social Bond questions. This means that the fewer social bonds a respondent has (or the higher their score on the social bonds questions), the higher perceived loneliness score they will have. A correlational test (Image 4.K) was conducted, comparing Hirschi social bond score results with perceived loneliness resulting in a moderate, positive correlation of $r=+.567$. With these results, this study concluded that, with this sample, low levels of Hirschi’s social bonds are positively correlated with high loneliness scores.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Hirschi</i>
Mean	17.8625	8.902439024
Variance	21.2846519	7.274314965
Observations	80	82
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	127	
t Stat	15.04312088	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00	
t Critical one-tail	1.656940344	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00	
t Critical two-tail	1.978819535	

4.L

A post-hoc two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances with a .05 alpha level was conducted to determine if this result was significant (Image 4.L). The test resulted in a p-value of 0.00, a t-stat of 15.04, and a one-tailed t-Critical value of 1.66. Due to this result, this survey concluded that the results were significant.

Discussion

The results of the study did not support Hypothesis #1. This study hypothesized that perceived social support would be negatively correlated with perceived loneliness. The results of this study found that, with this sample, perceived loneliness was not negatively correlated with perceived social support and, instead had a moderate, positive correlation. This finding was not consistent with similar studies of this topic, specifically Eiseman's study which appears in West, Kellner, & Moore-West's (1986) literature review of the existing studies on loneliness. This finding could, speculatively, be a result of a couple factors. It is possible that the unique population chosen (college freshmen and other students in low-level classes of the sociology department) is not compatible with the populations or samples in other studies. One other possible explanation this study considered is the increased use of social media and smartphones. These new technologies may make it easier for the population to stay in touch with friends and family. Therefore, although this population may be able to maintain social support electronically, they could still be suffering from loneliness due to lack of in-person interaction. Other explanations are entirely possible as well and the explanations discussed here are all post-hoc speculations.

The results of the study also did not support Hypothesis #2. This study hypothesized that female respondents would report greater perceived social support than male respondents. The results of this study found that, with this sample, females did not report greater perceived social support than males. In fact, the results came in rather equal with 77.78% of male respondents and 74.07% of female respondents reporting high perceived social support, 22.22% of male respondents and 25.93% of female respondents reporting moderate perceived social support, and 0% of male or female respondents reporting low perceived social support. As results in the literature are mixed in regard to these topics, the results of this study do not match the hypothesis, but are not entirely surprising. Through speculation again, perhaps the Western Michigan University environment is more supportive of males than females. Or perhaps the females in this sample are a group that is particularly under-supported or the males over-supported. There are any number of explanations for this result as well.

The results of the study did not support Hypothesis #3. This study hypothesized that there would be no significant difference between various races and perceived loneliness. The results found that, with this sample, Hispanic/Latinx respondents reported higher levels of perceived loneliness than White/Caucasian and Black/African American respondents. One possible explanation this study has for this finding is that the results may be skewed by the breakdown of races due to a poor sample. For example, there were only 3 Hispanic/Latinx respondents with significantly more White/Caucasian and Black/African American respondents.

Hypothesis #4 resulted in inconclusive results. This study hypothesized that dating, engaged, and married respondents would report greater social support than single respondents. The results found that, with this sample, there was a significant difference between relationship status and perceived social support. However, due to insufficient data, it could not be accurately determined where the significant difference occurred. There were only one engaged and one married respondent. A one-tailed t-test assuming unequal variances comparing single and dating respondents (Image 4.1) did not result in a significant difference, which would leave the engaged and married respondents to cause the significant difference. Although, this could also mean that due to a poor sample, that this finding does not hold. Because of these findings, until more research can be done regarding respondents who are married or engaged, this study finds this hypothesis inconclusive.

The results of the study did not support Hypothesis #5 as well. This study hypothesized that respondents that are members in an RSO and/or Greek life would have greater perceived social support than those who are not. The results found that, with this sample, respondents involved in these groups did not report greater perceived social support than those uninvolved.

The results of the study did support Hypothesis #6. This study hypothesized that low levels of Hirschi's social bonds would be positively correlated with high perceived loneliness. The lower the level of social bonds, which means a high score on the Hirschi social bonds questions in the survey, the higher the amount of perceived loneliness. The results found that there was a moderate, positive correlation between high Hirschi's social bond scores and high levels of perceived loneliness. With this sample, fewer social bonds correlated with higher loneliness.

No hypothesis involving living arrangements was included in this study as it was decided that this demographic characteristic was not telling enough of perceived loneliness or social support to warrant its own hypothesis.

The open-ended questions were also not incorporated into these hypotheses in this thesis. With so many varying responses, as well as several respondents leaving the open-ended questions blank, it is difficult to generalize the responses into usable data. Instead of attempting to incorporate the responses into this study, all of these responses have been compiled into a document that can be found at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vQfYMKBR57g-lnvSKgRGILM7elWbJQ78AvTx19OtTzDmn-73pc3NzTjCDhnGB2iSc5cuceDo9GKcTu6/pub>

The responses have been broken down by each question. This method will allow viewing and analysis of the open-ended question responses even though they do not directly apply to the hypotheses and goals of this study. Given more time, this study would have liked to find a way of operationalizing common responses to these open-ended questions to look for repeating trends among respondents. This could be a beneficial and interesting path for future research.

Conclusion

This study found that, overall, freshmen and students in low-level classes in WMU's Sociology Department actually report fairly high perceived social support. They also report mostly low and moderate loneliness. This should be positive news to the Sociology Department as well as the University. If anything, Western could implement a goal to lower perceived loneliness so that the majority of students fit in the low-loneliness category. Even with these positive results, Western may still benefit from the peer-led intervention programs described in Mattanah et al. (2012). As mentioned earlier in this study, these groups helped improve both the student's social peer group as well as academic accomplishment (Mattanah et al., 2012). Western may attempt to do this through their "First Year Experience" program. This semester-long program is exclusively for first year, first semester students at Western and has a goal of providing new students with the opportunity to meet new people and learn the basics of college life. In addition, Western may attempt to accomplish this goal through "New Student Orientation", completed during the summer before the beginning of the student's first academic year. The issue with these programs is that they are tailored exclusively to first semester freshmen. Although this study attempted to focus primarily on freshmen, loneliness is an issue that continues past the first semester of freshmen year. One other attempt that Western participates in to unite its students is Welcome Week, ending with Bronco Bash. Welcome Week occurs the week prior to the start of classes fall semester, beginning with the move-in of freshmen into the dorms towards the beginning of the week and concludes with Bronco Bash, a campus-wide meet-and-greet for a large number of groups in the community including, but not limited to, RSO's, Fraternities, Sororities, restaurants, recreational sports teams, religious groups, campus and community police departments, etc. Although Welcome Week, especially Bronco Bash, is celebrated by all grade classes at Western, the issue of targeting freshmen is also present here as Western only sponsors on-campus activities for freshmen (with the exception of Bronco Bash). This makes sense since most off-campus Welcome Week activities involve alcohol and drug consumption. However, Western could implement activities for students of all grade classes during this week. In addition, it could be beneficial for the university to expand these activities beyond just the beginning of fall semesters in order to accommodate transfer students or students who do not enter college at the beginning of the academic year.

Lastly, there are a couple potential flaws with this study that should be addressed once more. First, this was an entirely voluntary survey. Because of this, response bias is an issue that should be considered when examining the results of this study. It is possible that the respondents who chose to participate are not totally representative of the population assessed. Additionally, this study openly acknowledges that the population chosen was one of convenience. This study would recommend that, if this study were to be replicated, researchers should attempt to get access to a larger, less specific population. Possibly only first or second-semester freshmen in more than just one department. The specific and narrow population examined in this study means that the results suffer from external validity issues. A sample with more variation could be useful as well. Greater variation in race and relationship status could allow for more accurate tests to assess perceived loneliness and perceived social support. Next, with only five demographic groups examined, and only four of those being used in the hypotheses, it is entirely possible that

this study missed a demographic group that suffers more from perceived loneliness and lack of perceived social support. Perhaps sexual orientation or undergrads from divorced parents or undergrads who have lost parents in other ways could be examined as well. Finally, something that may result in some interesting findings is turning this study into a longitudinal study and monitoring student's perceived loneliness and social support over their college careers. It could be beneficial to see what, if any, trends occur over their time in college.

Loneliness as well as lack of social support are serious issues that should be monitored and have resources available for help. These topics can affect student's wellbeing and have an impact on their academic abilities. Luckily for undergrads in low-level classes in the Sociology Department of Western Michigan University, loneliness and lack of social support appears to be a less serious issue than this study hypothesized. Although, this may not be the case for students outside of this population. More studies like this could be beneficial to assist in student's transitions to college and ensure they have the best experience in college possible, both academically and socially.

Appendix 1: Survey

PLEASE READ FIRST: This survey contains questions over very personal topics: loneliness and social support. If at any point you do not wish to finish the survey, you may stop without any consequences to you. If you feel uncomfortable before, during, or after answering these questions and would like to talk to a professional, you may do so at:

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Demographic Characteristic Questions:

Which gender do you best identify with?

(a) Female

(b) Male

(c) Other (Please specify if comfortable) _____

Which racial/ethnic group do you best identify with?

(a) White/Caucasian

(b) Black/African-American

(c) Hispanic/Latinx

(d) Asian

(e) Middle-Eastern

(f) Pacific Islander

(g) Other (Please specify if comfortable) _____

What is your current relationship status? (FWB?)

- (a) Single
- (b) In a romantic relationship
- (c) Engaged
- (d) Married
- (e) Divorced
- (f) Widowed
- g) Other (Please specify if comfortable) _____

Are you currently a member of an RSO (Registered Student Organization) and/or a fraternity/sorority?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

Hirschi Social Bond Questions:

1. I feel a strong, personal connection to one or more persons at this campus.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Neutral
- (d) Disagree
- (e) Strongly Disagree

2. I feel committed to finishing my college degree.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Neutral
- (d) Disagree
- (e) Strongly Disagree

3. I believe that obtaining a college degree will be beneficial to my future.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Neutral
- (d) Disagree
- (e) Strongly Disagree

4. I feel involved at Western academically.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Neutral
- (d) Disagree
- (e) Strongly Disagree

5. I feel involved at Western socially.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Neutral
- (d) Disagree
- (e) Strongly Disagree

MSPSS QUESTIONS:

1. There is a special person who is around me when I am in need.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

2. There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

3. My family really tries to help me.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

6. My friends really try to help me.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

8. I can talk about my problems with my family.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

10. There is a special someone in my life who cares about my feelings.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

12. I can talk about my problems with my friends.

- (a) Very Strongly Agree
- (b) Strongly Agree
- (c) Agree
- (d) Neutral
- (e) Disagree
- (f) Strongly Disagree
- (g) Very Strongly Disagree

ULS-8 QUESTIONS:

1. I lack companionship.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

2. There is no one I can turn to.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

3. I am an outgoing person.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

4. I feel left out.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

5. I feel isolated from others.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

6. I can find companionship when I want it.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

7. I am unhappy being so withdrawn.

- (a) Always
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

8. People are around me but not with me.

- (a) Often
- (b) Sometimes
- (c) Rarely
- (d) Never

Open-ended Questions:

“In what ways have the members of your family affected your transition to college?”

“How have your relationships with new friends at Western affected your transition to college?”

“In what ways has your gender affected the quality of your relationships?”

“In what ways has your race/ethnicity affected the quality of your relationships?”

“How has your relationship status affected the quality of your relationships?”

“In what ways has your membership in an RSO or Fraternity/Sorority affected the quality of your relationship?”

UNDERGRADUATE LONELINESS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN WMU SOC DEPT.

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